

# What's the problem?

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When we focus on alcohol awareness, the first question usually asked is, "What's the problem, why are we doing this?"

I'd like to be able to tell you that the Liberty Wing doesn't have an alcohol problem, but unfortunately I'm unable to do so. At the same time, I want to be careful not to paint a picture of doom and gloom; the wing is not running rampant with alcohol-related incidents.

The fact is, during the past several months we have experienced a significant upward spike in the number of alcohol-related incidents. These incidents haven't been limited to DUIs. We've had domestic altercations and people have seriously injured themselves in accidents. We've had people do things they'd never think of doing when they're sober.

The wing leadership is serious and is taking a tough stand against this growing problem.

There are many elements in the process of reducing alcohol-related incidents. I believe education is the most important element because its focus is preventing incidents, not dealing with them after they've occurred.

I don't think I'd surprise you if I told you that alcohol use is ingrained in American

society. Simply put, we are a culture that uses alcohol. It is not unusual for Americans to consume alcohol in social settings, nor is it wrong. The problem arises when alcohol use leads to irresponsible behavior. Education plays a key role in helping ensure people use alcohol responsibly. A comprehensive education effort can go a long way toward reducing the number of alcohol-related incidents, but it must go to the root of the problem in order for it to be effective.

We must identify high-risk groups and make them the targets of our education efforts. If we determine the high-risk group is a specific group of individuals, who drink primarily on the weekends, we need to target that group. It is especially important that we reinforce our message prior to every weekend.

What we say, and how we say it, is equally important. The message should be that prudent alcohol use is, and always will be, a personal responsibility. It's a personal responsibility that people know their limits. It's a personal responsibility they have a plan to deal with situations when they over-indulge. And it's a personal responsibility that they not bow to peer pressure and deviate from their plan.

By the nature of our business, we are held to a stricter standard than our civilian counterparts. The message is simple: When a person consumes alcohol in excess and elects to drive or act inappropriately he/she has committed a crime. Yes, a crime, not a mistake.

The last part of the education process is that people must know that irresponsible alcohol use will have repercussions. We need to determine the appropriate consequences, publicize them so people are forewarned, and when the situation warrants it, be willing to "step up to the plate" and follow through with them. People must know that if they choose to use alcohol irresponsibly, they will "pay the price."

We have been lucky in the Liberty Wing. Although we've had a couple of close calls, to date we haven't buried anyone because someone chose to drink irresponsibly. I could say that I hope the luck continues, but that would be divorcing myself from my responsibility.

I can assure you, the wing leadership is doing its part; that effort has already begun and will be on-going. I ask each of you to join us and become a spokesperson against irresponsible alcohol use. I encourage you to "walk the talk" and be willing to challenge those who drink too much before they hurt themselves or somebody else. You may not be the most popular person at the moment, but believe me you will be doing the right thing!

I'm confident that with everyone's help we can reverse this upward surge in alcohol-related incidents, because one incident is one too many. With your help we'll whip this problem and make our community safer for all of us.

## Enemy

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we face in our wing today. I consider it to be the most formidable adversary I've ever had to deal with, and it's proven over and over again, that it can never be trusted. It's a lethal, cunning, proven killer, that has racked up an impressive killratio!

### Threat awareness

Col. Christopher Kelly, 100th Air Refueling Wing commander, and I are sponsoring the Great Lakenheath-Mildenhall-Feltwell Drink-Out March 7. Like the Great American Smoke-Out, our purpose is to focus on the threat of alcohol abuse with the goal of promoting health and wellness in our community and readiness. Let me stress we're not on a moral crusade to eliminate alcohol. But we must face

up to the fact that alcohol abuse can damage our bodies, lives and community. We must stop this cancer before it stops us.

### Game plan

To show community support against the threats of alcohol abuse, I challenge each of us to abstain from drinking alcohol for a 36-hour period beginning midnight March 7 through noon, March 8. This can be our silent yet active protest against the problems alcohol abuse can cause. If you can't make it without it driving you crazy or having to have just one drink, you may need some help. Now is the time to get it and stop the cancer from afflicting your body and our community.

### Execution

Just as a team is stronger than an individual, so is our commu-

nity as it fights together. It will take each and everyone of us to make a difference.

During our Great Drink-Out March 7, the Lakenheath clubs will be open and offer free food and non-alcoholic drinks. I hope to see many of you there as we make this commitment to one another. We can have great fun and still be the champions of our community!

So why the long analogy? Simple. I've often heard people say "This is only a problem with that group over there ... the majority of us aren't in this fight."

That's not the way I see it. We're all in this fight together. I see this affliction as a community cancer and it will take everyone's efforts to make a difference. Together, let's make a difference for our team and our community. "Done right -- first time -- on time."

## Team

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safely. Drinking shows how cool I am; I look sexy with a bottle in my hand. Folks dig me! And besides, I am so fundamental to the team, they wouldn't dare kick me off the squad.

As the vice wing commander, take it from me, don't bet on it!

The simple fact is that we can each do something to stop this terrible threat to our community. We can elect to get involved and put our foot down on alcohol abuse. We can continue to be a strong team by not abusing alcohol ourselves and ensuring our friends and families don't drink and drive or get so drunk that they lose control. If we don't support each other, we're not only hurting ourselves, but our community as well.